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Hays, Will Harrison

Scientific progress and the new era in motion pictures

[S.l.]

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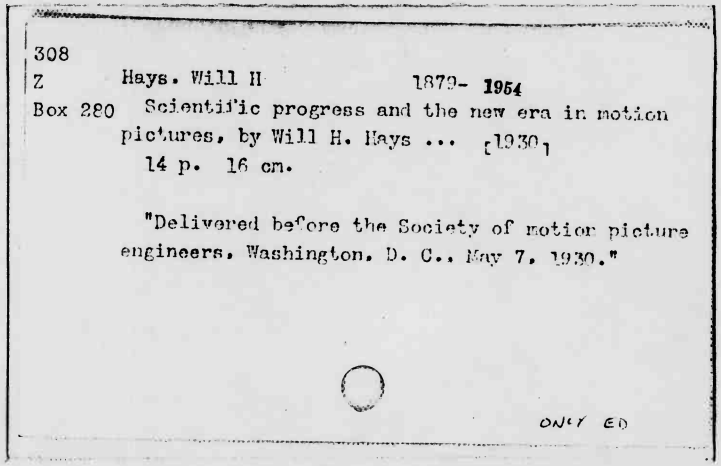

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Through the Presidency of ...

SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS AND THE NEW ERA IN MOTION PICTURES

by
WILL H. HAYS
President, Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.

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Box 280

Delivered before the
SOCIETY OF MOTION PICTURE ENGINEERS
WASHINGTON, D. C., MAY 7, 1930

June 29, 1930 SA
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SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS AND THE NEW ERA IN MOTION PICTURES

WE live amid infinite resources. Human ingenuity and human patience are the touchstones which discover those resources and transform them into tools for our progress, convenience and pleasure.

Addressing a gathering of engineers, research workers, and technical experts, and discussing the tremendous impetus which scientific development has given to the motion picture, I shall presume to review these achievements only in the light of the greater promise which the new art brings weekly to 250,000,000 people—a world multitude that finds recreation, inspiration, and satisfaction in the play of sound and sight now reflected by the screen.

You, who have worked quietly in laboratories to develop the chemical, mechanical and electrical processes that have made motion pictures the world's first universal form of entertainment, need no stimulus from me. The future is the blazing goal that continues to beckon to you. Your contributions to motion picture development have followed each other in amazing succession. Writers, directors, and artists have had to tax their ingenuity to absorb and utilize the expanding powers and the new devices which you have put at their disposal. Producers have added a new

and brilliant chapter to the history of industrial achievement, by their rapid and universal adoption of sound, your latest contribution. The financial fabric of our nation has responded to the stability and good management which the motion picture industry has achieved during the last decade and has put behind you and us the millions necessary for further research and for marketing the product you have made possible. The public has responded with an increased patronage of millions weekly to the appeal of the new art created by sound.

Crossroads of Progress

A few years ago the motion picture industry stood at the crossroads of progress in picture development. An art had been created based on the pantomime of lights and shadows. Photography, apparently, had lavished its greatest resources on the screen. The progress of studio technique had made silence eloquent with action. The spectacles of ancient and modern history had been reconstructed for motion picture backgrounds. Talented men and women had developed a new artistry of acting for the screen. Writers and dramatists had learned to create special forms of entertainment based on the opportunities of the motion picture art. The fields of literature, history and drama were combed for source material to inspire picture production.

In a few years, the industry had passed from the peep show to the motion picture palace, forging ahead with giant strides to create a new and ever-growing art for the world's democracy of entertainment. This was a great achievement indeed.

But for those who take the helm of leadership there is no stopping on the road of scientific and technical progress. The word "stabilization" does not exist in the lexicons of science or of art. One scientific discovery either prepares for, or makes way for, another. A true art form is a living, growing thing.

The Screen Finds a Voice

Sound came to the industry, and almost overnight the screen found a voice. Silence no longer stood in the way of film development. The motion picture screen, which had reflected, through pantomime, life, literature, history and the stage, found new reservoirs of material. The whole world of opera and music was opened to the movies. In a marvelously brief period new forms of entertainment were actually created that increased the motion picture audience of the United States last year by more than 15,000,000 people weekly—making the total weekly attendance 115,000,000.

The sound motion picture will become equally the servant, the universal servant, of education. I doubt whether even you, who have been fashioning the implements of the new magic, have had time fully to realize what you have done for the education of the world. The truth is that you have created the textbook of the future, a contribution to the spread of greater knowledge unequalled since the Gutenberg Bible became exhibit "A" in the history of movable type.

You heard on Monday from Mr. Tuttle of the special lights and camera processes which have been developed for the particular purpose of making colored motion pictures of great surgical operations.

Progress of Medical Films

The medical profession has been splendid in seeing the possibilities of the motion picture as an implement of instruction, and the important experiments which have been conducted at the Eastman laboratories are in response to a demand which grew out of conferences as early as 1926, when the industry let it be known to leaders in medicine and surgery that the wonders of the motion picture were at their disposal. In that year the American College of Surgeons appointed a distinguished committee to develop the matter consisting of Squier, Chipman, Crile, Charles Mayo, Crowell, and Dr. Franklin H. Martin, now president of the College and a consistent leader in the entire movement. Mr. Eastman generously supplied the funds, and the experimentation to lead to a certainty of surgical films began.

In those early conferences we were thinking in terms of the silent picture, unaided by the great corollary advantages of sound and color. Next September the College of Physicians at Columbia University will have ready a series of sound films for instruction and the medical schools of Johns Hopkins, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, and Ohio State are part of a group which expect to make and distribute these films.

No longer will the country doctor be handicapped by his inability to travel to the medical education centers and take an unending series of post-graduate courses in a science which progresses steadily from year to year. He can see the newest in technique, vividly portrayed on the screen, with each movement of the skilled hand

displayed and every reason for the method concurrently explained by the master who is performing the operation.

Imagine the values of a close-up, slow motion picture in color of a Mayo, Crile or Squier performing a difficult operation and describing it minutely, so that instead of 20 students watching from a balcony it could be shown to 100,000 students a score of times if necessary!

The Textbook of the Future

This great contribution to the advancement of surgical science is an impressing way but only one of the myriad ways in which the talking motion picture in colors will become the textbook of the future. In September of last year I wrote a letter to 573 university and college presidents, asking them to outline fields of activity and detail in which the motion picture might serve the cause of pedagogy. All replied, and more than 300 contributed useful and inspiring suggestions. These suggestions are being studied and will be applied.

What would it add to the pageant of history, if Washington were to speak to us from his own time through the medium of the films? If, here, tonight you could see and hear Faraday discuss electricity, if Steinmetz through the living sound and motion of the screen could confront you tonight? If the nation, through a film broadcast, could hear Lincoln tonight? If, in addition to the facts gathered from books, we could feel the vibrant force of other famous personalities of the past and the tempo of their age?

These vast possibilities inherent in the audible motion picture will be your gift and the motion picture industry's gift to the future—and these

possibilities, I submit, challenge us all to make certain of the full use of their values.

President Hoover Cooperates

Specifically, I desire to announce on this occasion that on behalf of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America I have this day offered to the United States Government our aid in collecting and permanently preserving the picture records of historical events now available and which will hereafter be made by the American motion picture industry.

By this means the United States will take deserved leadership in the creation and development of the great library of the future. To the records of printed and written words which now comprise the pages of history, will be added the living records of sound, movement and color that will picture significant contemporary events to the coming generations with the vividness, realism and certitude of life. The pageant of history, of education, of national events and great local happenings will hereafter be recorded in the living tempo of the time in which the events occurred.

This will be brought about by the joint action of our Government and of the motion picture industry. Committees will be appointed both by the President and by our industry to make this cooperation most effective. With the President this cooperation has been developed and by him this afternoon I was authorized to make this announcement.

In the vaults of our member companies are the negatives of all the principal contemporary historical events since the news weeklies made their record possible. Prints of these we will present

to the Government to be preserved under its auspices in keeping with the best scientific practice.

You of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers can aid the project with your technical cooperation, possibly by the appointment by your President of an appropriate committee of your organization. The best method of preservation you will develop.

The Governmental storing facilities will be hastened, located in the place best suited for the purpose. In such building, also, may be preserved the splendid war and other pictures taken by the Government agencies and now handled as effectively as is possible under the facilities available.

Religion Profits from Films

I have had the pleasure, too, of placing at the disposal of the International Motion Picture Institute at Rome the facilities of the industry to aid in cataloguing the world's present supply of educational films. That supply is only the alphabet of a literature, the spring freshet which will grow into a great river adding to the ocean of human knowledge.

Culture, education, even religion are in heavy debt to you. Under the chairmanship of Dr. Howard LeSourd, of the Boston University School of Religious Education and Social Service, a committee of leaders in the field of religious education has just made public a study of the growing value of motion pictures to our churches and Sunday schools. They found that more than 2,000 churches in the country now make some use of motion pictures in connection with services or teaching, and this number is growing every

week. "The future is bright," the committee report says, adding, "The opinion of ministers experienced in the use of motion pictures as to their future possibilities for religious education in its broad sense is overwhelmingly positive. It seems to them that a mere beginning has been made and that the church should look forward to an ever-increasing and more efficient use of pictures in its program. There is every prospect of the church utilizing to the full this marvelous new art for the realization of its highest objectives."

Entertainment a Vital Purpose

I need but add to the statement of these distinguished leaders in the religious field that the motion picture industry will continue to cooperate to the full in their high purpose.

If I have stressed the great collateral values and services of motion pictures—in education, in culture, in the broad aspects of religion—it is not because I underestimate for a moment the progress of the motion picture art in the field of wholesome entertainment. Entertainment itself is a vital purpose in modern life. It is a re-creating and rehabilitating influence that the world cannot do without. In the drab routine that covers the lives of so many millions of people, the entertainment picture comes to create a new will to do and a new viewpoint of life. It is not a luxury that pampers the eye and the ear; it has become a necessity to the life of the world.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that you of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers, who have fused many sciences to create these possibilities, should work largely unseen and unheard, insofar as the

public is concerned. All the more the tribute of achievement is yours.

Starting with the physical material on which the motion picture depends—the film itself—the research engineer has been the agent of the fundamental, essential progress. Next you have constantly improved the photographic eye which registers every scene and detail. The skill, thought, labor and microscopically exact machinery required to make camera equipment are in themselves miracles of high precision. The lighting problems presented by motion picture requirements have taxed the utmost resources of electrical science.

Tribute to the Engineer

Through your accomplishments, the motion picture now walks and talks and acts and sings.

To all this you are adding the tonal qualities of color, making great progress in translating nature in many of her glorious color effects. Your latest efforts are engaged in the problems involved in the perfection of the wide-screen that would reproduce the scale and perspective of life.

Nor will you be satisfied with that; your vision is already sweeping toward three-dimensional effects or the illusion of stereoscopic reproduction. That indeed would be life in motion on the screen.

Through the technical developments which you have brought, we, who are entrusted also with the responsibilities of translating into performance the social and community factors involved in motion picture production, found more problems to solve.

Sound brought a new army of authors, writers,

dramatists and artists and a vast field of new material to the motion picture studios, and the principles governing the maintenance of social and community values in the production of pictures had to be amplified, and new provisions added, in order that we might carry out our public responsibility.

The Production Code recently announced on behalf of the motion picture industry crystallizes the production policies evolved by the industry during the past eight years. It is a tribute to the vitality and importance of the motion picture art that few subjects have been so widely discussed.

Nation Backs the Code

The public and editorial opinion which speaks for the fatherhood and motherhood of the nation, and which stands by the modern industrial dictum of public responsibility, has applauded the motives, the principles and the aims which have led the motion picture industry of the United States to adopt such a Code. The overwhelming weight of opinion has been in this direction.

The new Production Code is a challenge to the creative genius of all those who serve the art of the screen. It is a great step toward new artistic heights in motion picture production. It is a milestone in the progress of wholesome entertainment. The Code expresses the requirements of propriety, of good taste and of public morals, in the production of motion pictures. It places no frontiers upon the progress of art. It restricts no man or woman with a worth-while message to deliver. It puts no bars upon the creation of wholesome entertainment. In banning vulgarity of scene or suggestion the motion picture industry is serving

the public and serving itself. The virility of the art is not dependent upon vulgarity.

No code, no regulation, no set of principles, is worth the paper it is written on unless there is a considered will and determination to observe it. The determination already expressed by producers, the enthusiastic support of picture directors, writers and actors, the solid way in which the recent sentiment of the country is lined up behind the Code, will prove the strongest factors in its realization. We remember the necessity of a demand for good pictures as well as the necessity of a supply. Personally, I know the American public will support the best standards and I assure you that the supply of pictures so generally good now, will completely square with the promise of the Code when next Fall or early Winter the pictures made under this new and democratic instrument of self-regulation are released to the public.

A Look Into the Future

The future of the motion picture art is indeed brilliant in its promise of entertainment, cultural development and of technical progress. Let us step for a moment into the cinema of tomorrow. It is a theatre that surpasses the finest architectural achievement of the present, built solely for sound-picture entertainment. Magnificent orchestration, superb lighting, natural backgrounds of surpassing beauty prepare the eye and ear for what is to come. The curtain rises on a screen as wide as the theatre's arch permits. Color and sound are blended in the brief prelude which sets the motif and tone for the evening.

Music, composed for the film, in rising and falling tempo with the action, flows uninter-

ruptedly during the performance, save when it dies away to permit the accentuation of voices. The photographic effects are no longer those of the flat screen; they have a marvelous illusion of third dimension, far transcending stereoscope of childhood memories.

To all this is added the final charm of color in Nature's true shades. Sunlight seems real sunlight, the tiniest variation of the shades of green in the leaves is there—nature brought within doors. You hear the faint caress of the breeze on those leaves, the hum of insects, the twittering of birds, the light note of laughter of the boy and girl who start on the great adventure which is to be the film's story.

You will deserve the first meed of praise for this miracle theatre of the future, but there will also be praise due to the component parts of an industry that has with courage and patience absorbed every new invention and every refinement made possible by technical achievement. You have learned to trust the courage and willingness of the industry to go ahead; the industry, in turn, has learned to look with confidence to you for ever new and greater inventive progress. To your work and to the work of those who make the pictures with the scientific wonders you provide, the American public and the world public has given an endorsement unparalleled in history. Such endorsement must keep us alert and alive to our great public responsibilities.

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